

The Vanishing Hitchhiker*

RICHARD K. BEARDSLEY
ROSALIE HANKEY

THIS IS THE STORY just as we heard it several months ago, from a level-headed, conscientious business man. "I've never been able to understand this," he began hesitatingly. "It happened to a friend of mine, Sam Kerns, a fellow who went to Cal with me. He can't explain it either.

"Kerns and another man were driving home from a party in San Francisco. It was a wretched night, bitingly cold and raining with such violence that driving was difficult. As they drew near a stop sign on Mission Street they made out the indistinct form of a woman standing on the corner, quite alone, as if she were waiting for someone. Since it was after two o'clock in the morning and they knew that the street cars no longer were running, they stared at her curiously as they drew up to the corner. Then Kerns brought the car to a sharp halt, for standing in the pouring rain without a coat or an umbrella was a lovely girl, dressed in a thin white evening gown. She was evidently in some embarrassment or trouble so without hesitation they offered to take her home. She accepted and got into the back seat of their two-door sedan. Realizing that she must be chilled, they wrapped her in the car blanket. She gave them an address near Twin Peaks and added that she lived there with her mother. However, she made no attempt to explain her presence on Mission Street in the pouring rain, without coat or umbrella. The men started toward Twin Peaks making some efforts at conversation, to which the girl responded politely but in a manner which showed plainly that she did not care to talk. When they reached Fifth Street, Kern's friend looked round

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to see if she were comfortable. There was no one in the back seat. Startled, he leaned over to see if she might have fallen to the floor, but, except for the crumpled blanket, there was nothing to be seen. Amazed and frightened, he made Kerns stop the car. Without doubt the girl was gone.

"The only possible explanation of her disappearance was that she had slipped quietly out of the car; but they had not stopped since picking her up. That she could have jumped from the car while it was moving and closed the door behind her was almost impossible. Thoroughly puzzled and not a little worried, they decided to go to the address she had given. After some difficulty they found the house, an old ramshackle building with a dim light showing from the interior. They knocked and after a long wait the door was opened by a frail old woman, clutching a shawl over her shoulders. As they began their story they were struck by the complete incredibility of the entire business. Feeling more and more foolish, they stumbled on as best they could. The old woman listened patiently, almost as if she had heard the same story before. When they had finished, she smiled wanly, 'Where did you say you picked her up?' she asked. 'On First and Mission,' Kerns replied.

"'That was my daughter,' the old woman said. 'She was killed in an automobile accident at First and Mission two years ago.' "

The business man went on to explain that at first he had considered this nothing more than a good yarn to keep in mind in case a conversation should turn to ghosts. But shortly thereafter he heard an almost identical story in Chicago, told by a man who insisted it was true because it had happened to his brother-in-law. Then, to make matters more confusing, he heard that the story was widely told in and around Salt Lake City—only there the girl was picked up at a dance.

We became acquainted with the vanishing hitchhiker in much the same fashion. When without difficulty we collected a dozen variants from friends, acquaintances and strangers, we realized that the attractive hitchhiker was a creature of folklore who appeared not only in Chicago, Salt Lake City, and San Francisco, but in a dozen towns in California. Encouraged, we began to collect seriously both orally and by mail. Two months of inquiry resulted in a total of more than sixty variants, twelve of which we received in a body from a collection initiated by Professor Archer Taylor in and around Chicago in 1931.¹ As stories began to trickle

¹ For the use of these versions in our tabulations, we gratefully acknowledge the ready co-operation of Professor Wayland D. Hand, whose studies on predictions of calamities found material in our Version B stories. We await with interest the publication of this material for which Professor Hand is at present still gathering stories.

in from New York, New Hampshire, Kentucky, Georgia, Texas, and Montana, it became evident that the legend was told all over the United States.

Our attempts to date our stories were not always successful, since many of the narrators had difficulty in remembering when they heard their variant. But more than half of our narrators recalled the approximate year in which they first heard the story, which dated the period when the variant was current. On the other hand, since the teller almost invariably mentioned the city or town in or near which the hitchhiker appeared, we had the geographic location of almost every story.

Giving a specific location of the story is one device used to emphasize the authenticity which adds greatly to the effectiveness of the tale. This effort to make the story seem true has been observed in many other tales current in the United States and Europe today. Alexander Woollcott, in his discussion of several modern legends, was impressed by this characteristic and unsuccessfully attempted to trace his stories to the actual event described or at least to the person who originated the tale.² At the beginning of our study we, too, investigated the possibility that the story arose from some factual occurrence, perhaps a peculiar or spectacular automobile accident. We took a detailed local variant and checked it thoroughly with the Berkeley city records. But we found that no serious accident had occurred on the street corner named for the five years preceding and the five years after the date given in the story.³ Of course this shows only that this particular variant had little basis in fact. However, not just one, but sixty localities are the "guaranteed" scene of the vanishing hitchhiker's peculiar activities. Tracing the possible factual sources of all these stories would entail a great deal of effort and would probably yield completely negative results.

In our group of seventy-nine stories we found four distinctly different versions, distinguishable because of obvious differences in development and essence. These versions will be discussed in detail later. However, for clarity in the discussion immediately following, an example of each is given here. We present them exactly as told by the narrators. Unless specifically stated, no changes, additions or subtractions have been made in any of the stories printed in this paper.

² Alexander Woollcott, *While Rome Burns*, New York, 1932, pp. 86, 93-94.

³ See No. 20.

VERSION A

1

Berkeley, California, 1934.—A young man was riding along a street in Berkeley in his car. It was very late. On a street corner he noticed a well-dressed young woman. He asked if he could help her get home, and she entered the back of the car. She gave him her address. When he arrived at the address, he was amazed to find that she had disappeared. After a vain search, he decided to question the occupants of the house. A young man answered his ring. He told his story and described the strange young woman. The man who had answered the doorbell became terrified and said that the description fitted his fiancée, who had been killed in an automobile accident exactly at the corner where she had been picked up. (The narrator added that the man who told her this story really believed it.)

VERSION B

2

Ringsted, Iowa, undated.—A newly married couple were on their honeymoon and were returning in late July from a visit to the World's Fair in Chicago. The last day they were on the road was very stormy, and driving slowly they saw an old woman at the side of the road hailing a ride. They picked her up, and during a brief introduction learned she was from Ringsted, Iowa. She told them not to go to the Fair after September first, for the Enchanted Island was going to sink into the Lake. Silence followed, and when the young wife looked around to talk with the old woman, the woman was gone. The couple were puzzled and decided to go to Ringsted to investigate about their passenger. They stopped at the place where the old woman said she had lived, but the persons living there at the time informed them that the woman had lived there but that she had passed away a year before. The couple described the old woman, and the residents of the Ringsted home said that those clothes were the identical ones in which the old woman had been buried—and that it was exactly a year to the day that the old woman had died.

VERSION C

3

Salt Lake City, Utah, 1939.—At a Christmas dance a certain young man was attracted by a beautiful young girl dressed in white. She was a stranger in the hall, but he soon made her acquaintance and danced with her

during the evening. At the close of the dance he asked to take her home. When they left the hall the girl had no coat, so the young man offered her his overcoat, which she wore. They got in a car with another couple and on the way to the address which she had given as her home she asked to stop at the cemetery for a minute. She insisted on getting out alone but promised not to be long. She didn't return to the car and after efforts to find her failed, they left the cemetery. The following day the young man went to her home address to get his overcoat. The woman who answered the door said no one by that name lived there but a family by that name had lived there some years ago. The girl he was inquiring about had been dead many years. The young man then went to the cemetery. He found a grave with the marker bearing her name and age, eighteen years, at death. Folded neatly upon the headstone was his overcoat.

VERSION D

4

Hawaii, undated.—(This was told by a native Hawaiian, a Yale graduate, as a true story.)

A friend of his was driving along the highway climbing the slopes of one of the volcanoes on the island of Hawaii. He saw an old woman walking along the road, carrying a basket, and offered her a ride. She got into the back seat of his two-door sedan. When he reached the summit he turned around to look at her, but she had disappeared. She was Pelee, who is known by the fact that she always carried something.

THE ORIGINAL STORY

Our primary objective was to determine which of our variants was the original story. By this we do not mean that we hoped to find the first vanishing hitchhiker story ever told. Rather we attempted to abstract a version from which others could logically develop and which embodied the oldest elements. It was necessary to reduce our conglomeration of stories to some uniformity and to organize them for comparability. We decided that the elements of all the stories could be grouped under headings or constituent elements which in themselves represented the episodic pattern of the story. Despite the wide variance of specific minor elements, this pattern is fundamentally the same throughout—introductory remarks, description of driver and vehicle, character of the hitchhiker, circumstances of the pickup, disappearance, explanation of the disappearance, narrator's concluding remarks.

DISCUSSION OF THE CONSTITUENT ELEMENTS

Introductory remarks.—As is characteristic of *Sagen*, various attempts are made in the course of narration to give these tales the appearance of actual incidents. In forty variants the absolute truth of the story is implied or positively stated. Evidence of the narrator's veracity is generally given before the narration begins. Perhaps the adventure happened to a friend (thirteen cases) or to a relative (two cases); it is almost always located in a definite city or town; usually dates and addresses, as well as the names of the participants, are given or remembered as having been told. "I've forgotten her name and the exact address," is a familiar comment. In eleven stories street names and even addresses are recorded.

In thirty-one stories the hitchhiker appears after dark; in fourteen, the hour is downright late; only four were seen specifically in the daytime. The significance of the time of day is not always clear. It is logical for Version C, the dance hall story, to occur late at night, as it may be for Version B, the story of the prophesying woman, to occur in the daytime; at any rate, these variants show some correlation.

When the weather is mentioned, it is windy, rainy, snowy, or anything but pleasant. It is possible that the narrator thought that such an unusual incident required an eerie setting. It is also likely that the mention of bad weather provides a logical excuse for the pickup.

Widespread distribution and the early date for occurrence indicate that the story was originally told as "gospel truth" and that it had a nocturnal setting. Although stormy weather is consistent with the theme of the tale, there is no good evidence for its age; it is not mentioned in the oldest variants.

Description of the driver and vehicle.—In all but three stories the hitchhiker rides in an automobile; of these, one involves a buggy⁴ and one a mail wagon.⁵ These exceptional stories possess such undoubtedly literary features as a bloodstained gown or a shroud-like dress worn by the hitchhiker. A third variant employs a cable car in San Francisco as a device for local color. Although it is not a priori impossible that the story had a literary origin nor that it arose in the period of horsedrawn vehicles, the test of geographic distribution and the overwhelming numerical frequency of seventy-six out of seventy-nine preferences for the automobile indicate that this was the vehicle used in the original story.

It is not so simple to pick out the original driver. The term "driver"

⁴ See No. 22.

⁵ See No. 21.

must, of course, include all the occupants of the car in which the hitchhiker rides. Preponderantly the hitchhiker appears to a lone man (forty-six instances); but he is accompanied by one or more persons thirty-two times, has been married and is with his wife twelve times, and has multiplied into a family twice; in six stories we know only of "people" in the car that stops for the hitchhiker. There appear, however, certain correlations with the major variants. Version A shows a random occurrence of various groupings, but has a numerical preponderance of single men (thirty-two out of forty versions). The young man who makes a pickup at a dance (Version C) is usually unencumbered, or has one or two male companions. By contrast, the prophesying woman of Version B attracts the sympathy of a married couple or a family driving along the highway. That it was originally an automobile that was driven is virtually certain; that a lone man drove it is less certain, but probable.

Character of the hitchhiker.—It is essential that each variant contain a character corresponding to the hitchhiker; the term is not always accurate, except in referring to a person given a ride in someone else's car. The vanishing hitchhiker is without exception female and is rather elaborately described in some versions. The briefest of descriptions indicates how old she is—as might be assumed—in women, the age makes the difference. Yet, in fourteen stories we are told only her sex. The real contrast is between the young girls who attract the driver through their beauty, and the old women, who are enfeebled or burdened by a load.

We must, of course, ask, "Which came first, the chicken or the hen?" The answer is indicated by the disproportion of forty-seven girls to fourteen old women. Moreover, there is no localization of the stories involving girls; variants from all the peripheries of our distribution as well as from the centers feature girls. Version C, by reason of its dance hall setting, stars only young girls. In contrast to this is Version B in which no young women are specified. This version, emphasizing a prophecy, shows five old women and four whose ages are not given; we believe that the association of old age with the women of this version may be closer than the figures show. Version A has a preponderance of girls, and the oldest dated stories contain girls. For these reasons, it is probable that the "original" hitchhiker was a girl.

Remarks are made in twenty-seven stories in further description of the hitchhiker; about one in three of these has something noteworthy about her dress, actions, or appearance. The description of the girl frequently is intended to emphasize her attractiveness, e.g., by mentioning a thin

evening dress,⁶ or a clinging black velvet cape.⁷ But for each age class the intention in several instances is to hint at her true ghostly nature. Her dress is never colored, but may be black or white. Especially in the over-elaborated variants does this garment resemble a shroud,⁸ or actually may be graveclothes.⁹ In other cases, the description is intended to show that the hitchhiker had reason for wanting or for being offered a ride; the girl carries an armful of books,¹⁰ the woman a heavy bag,¹¹ the old woman a basket.¹² This burden sometimes serves a more concrete function; it is left in the car to prove that the hitchhiker was really there. In rainy weather the hitchhiker may have no umbrella or raincoat,¹³ while the girl at a dance is without a wrap to cover her thin evening dress.¹⁴ There may be nothing more tangible than a "tired and pitiful attitude" to attract gallant assistance. Little correlation is shown in these elements of description. They represent the narrator's fancy at play with his material, rather than anything integral to the story.

Therefore it is likely that the hitchhiker of the original version was an attractive, implicitly delicate, young girl. She may have been definitely described, but this element, if it existed, has been varied beyond possible reconstruction.

Circumstances of the pickup.—Up to this point in the story, where the action commences, there has been little indication of divergence among the major versions. Those examples of Version B in which the time is mentioned occur in the daytime and involve women or old women. Version C must occur late at night, and presupposes a young girl. Version A is less particular, but is inclined to young girls and lone drivers. From this point on, however, the differences between major versions become increasingly clear.

We have applied the label of "vanishing hitchhiker" to the female ghosts of all major versions, without distinction. This term is appropriate for Versions A and B, even though the lady in question may be offered a ride (thirty-four cases) instead of asking for or appearing to expect one (eighteen cases). She may be encountered on the street corner of a city (twenty-four variants) or on the open highway (thirty-three variants); the higher proportion met on the highway is reduced when we subtract all variants of Version B, in which the hitchhiker uniformly appears outside of a city. It would be a tossup as to whether we should meet a standard

⁶ See No. 22.

⁷ See No. 2.

¹² See No. 36.

⁷ See No. 35.

¹⁰ See No. 8.

¹³ See story at beginning of paper.

⁸ See No. 41.

¹¹ See No. 11.

¹⁴ See Nos. 3, 16.

vanishing hitchhiker in town or out, but if we were looking for a prophecy, we should do well to stay in the country.

We have less justification, though, in terming the girl of Version C a hitchhiker, since this girl is encountered in a setting described (according to the taste of the narrator) as a dance (seven cases), night club (two cases), or a beer joint (one case). The situation is not that of a "hitchhiker" but of a "pickup." In this as in other elements, Version C is the most divergent. In fact, Version C may be a completely different story converging in details to resemble the "vanishing hitchhiker." This possibility is discussed in a later section. There are three versions of Version A which show possible contamination by Version C, since the girl is met in a night club or at a dance.

Other aberrant locations should be mentioned. In five Midwestern variants, a hitchhiking woman or old woman appears near a cemetery.¹⁵ In Hawaii, local color is added to one variant by making the beach the scene of the incident.¹⁶

From preponderance of numbers, we judge that the street or highway is the original scene of the pickup, but we cannot definitely choose between these two alternatives. Those variants with the earliest probable dates¹⁷ use the highway, which also exhibits slightly higher frequency and thus has a slight, though doubtful, edge.

An element of some significance, since it occurs twenty-nine times in quite separate localities, involves the hitchhiker's riding in the rear seat of the car, and is generally used to explain her vanishing without notice. In four of these variants it is pointed out that the car was a two-door sedan, lest the disappearance be explained too readily. This feature is peculiar to Versions A, B, and D; the girl of Version C, who is being taken home from a dance, would hardly be expected to forego the front seat.

We assume that in every story in which the driver reaches the hitchhiker's home, it is because she gives him directions, although this, too, is frequently implied, not stated. In a few instances, the home does not enter the story, but when it does, the narrator frequently "remembers" that he heard an exact number given on a specific street.

It is during the drive that follows the pickup that Version B distinguishes itself; i.e., in the course of the conversation the hitchhiker warns of a coming catastrophe. There is a curious consistency about these prophetic warnings: they are never made by a girl, they are made only in the midwest, and of a total of nine, seven concern the Chicago Centennial

¹⁵ See Nos. 30, 40, 45, 47, 74.

¹⁶ See No. 32.

¹⁷ See Nos. 9, 21-25.

Fair to which the motorists are driving. Various disasters are prophesied; notably, that the Fair will sink under water or slide into Lake Michigan by a certain date,¹⁸ that an epidemic is imminent in the city¹⁹ to which the driver is headed, or that a shaky bridge will collapse.²⁰ The prophecy is the focal point of this version; the uncanny sequel of disappearance and discovery that the hitchhiker was not of the living serve only to convince the hearer of the truth of the prediction. This emphasis in contrast to Versions A and C, where the disappearance and the supernatural are all-important, adds to the evidence from minor details and geographic restriction that this group of "prediction stories" is a block set apart from the standard hitchhiker. We have additional reports of a similar story told at the Texas Centennial Fair, which followed the Century of Progress, but no versions. It may be that the story, or some like it, jumps from event to event; we leave this problem for future research to determine.

The original scene of the pickup was probably the highway, because this is the older of the two most frequent locations. Version B always occurs along the highway, and Version C probably began in a dance hall. It is likely that the original hitchhiker rode in the rear seat and that she gave the driver her address.

Disappearance.—After the characters have been introduced and the setting laid, the intrigued listener is precipitated into the crux of the story by the sudden and inexplicable disappearance of the hitchhiker. In fifty-three versions no one witnesses this disappearance; only twice is it observed by the driver. The twenty versions which lack the disappearance include every instance of Version C and the C-contaminated variants of Version A (eleven in all). One-third of the Version B stories lack the disappearance, whereas fifty-three of our sixty Version A hitchhikers vanish.

Although the stories in which there are no disappearances are sporadic in comparison to those in which the hitchhiker vanishes, we can find groupings. The girl picked up at a dance in Salt Lake City (Version C) is deposited on the street a few doors from her home, lest she wake her family. In some C stories she gets out of the car at a cemetery, a feature found in no other variant. Nondisappearance variants are scattered over most of the known hitchhiker area, but, except in Salt Lake City, they are isolated. In Connecticut, the South, the Midwest, Los Angeles, and Hawaii, the girl is let off at home; in Indiana and Berkeley she goes to her mother's house or to that of a relative. No uniformity prevails except in Version C as found at Salt Lake City.

¹⁸ See Nos. 10, 11, 41.

¹⁹ See No. 39.

²⁰ See No. 73.

Version A stories, with a majority of disappearances (forty-seven out of sixty tales), are almost monotonously regular in describing the driver's astonishment "when he turned around as he came to the street she had given him, to find she was not there." The dramatic effectiveness of the disappearance is preserved in most stories by leaving the statement without elaboration. But explanations which hint prematurely of the supernatural occur: the hitchhiker may vanish after crossing a stream²¹ or after passing a cemetery.²² We should note an ingeniously plausible exit made by the girl at a service station where the driver has stopped for gas. He makes a natural, and erroneous, assumption and waits for some time in vain.²³ In a less subtle variant the girl vanishes before the horrified eyes of the driver, who only at that time perceives the bloodstain on her white dress.²⁴ These are all patent specializations upon the simple theme of disappearance, which is a logical precursor for any of them.

The question of whether disappearance or nondisappearance belongs to the original story presents a difficult problem. On the one hand, sixty-eight per cent of the stories contain a disappearance. On the other, non-disappearance variants give evidence of age; they show much variation and are widely scattered, with each variant more or less isolated (except in Salt Lake City). More stories and a better distribution would clear up this problem. At present, on the basis of frequency, we decide in favor of the disappearance, although we admit the disappearance may have been adopted at a later time as a device for increasing suspense and for guaranteeing that the driver will go on to the denouement. There is no doubt, however, that the hitchhiker has always been one returned from the dead.

Explanation of the disappearance.—In those stories marked by the sudden disappearance of the hitchhiker an understandable curiosity or concern at this apparent breach of natural law impels the driver to inquire at the address she gave him for more information about this curious being. Occasionally an additional motive is added: she has left something in the car which should be returned to her. These are oddly miscellaneous objects: a book,²⁵ a bicycle,²⁶ a suitcase,²⁷ or a basket.²⁸ Until late in our period of collecting, it seemed that none of the narrators was going to wonder what happened to the mounting number of books, bicycles, etc.,

²¹ See No. 21.

²² See No. 30.

²³ R. Hankey, "California Ghosts," *California Folklore Quarterly*, I (April, 1942), p. 174, story No. 32.

²⁴ See No. 22.

²⁵ See No. 5.

²⁶ See No. 8.

²⁷ R. Hankey, *op. cit.*, No. 38.

²⁸ See No. 9.

repeatedly brought to the door by bewildered motorists. This problem found an answer in the variant from Ossining: the hitchhiker's mother added the latest suitcase to a pile which in the three months since her daughter's death had filled a closet to overflowing.²⁹ The heap was shown to the driver as evidence that his was but one in a series of similar experiences. The basket carried by the old woman is also left in the car, except in two variants from Hawaii.³⁰ In these stories (according to K. Luomala, a student of Polynesian folklore to whom we owe one variant), the basket is a sign by which the goddess Pelee may be recognized, even through her disguise. From Hawaii also comes another novel element; when the girl leaves the car, the seat is damp where she had been sitting, and a piece of seaweed is lying there.³¹ In Version C stories the girl sometimes gives her escort a legitimate reason for returning to see her when she neglects to give back his overcoat.³²

In short, a wide variety of ingenious motives, most frequently curiosity, concern, or a "desire to see the attractive girl again," lead the driver to call at the hitchhiker's address. The heterogeneous specific elements which bring him there could logically be added to the more general one of curiosity and concern, which is probably earliest since it is widespread and frequently used.

In fifty-one of the fifty-nine stories when the driver calls at the door, he is confronted with the startling news that his hitchhiker is no living person, but has been dead for some time. In the remaining stories other devices are substituted to give this news, some in addition to a visit to her home. In any event, the narrator makes sure by one or several means that this gruesome news is revealed. In Salt Lake City³³ and in Honolulu³⁴ the discovery of her death is made accidentally, i.e., without going to her home for information; a visit to the cemetery substantiates the death in Salt Lake City (Version C).³⁵ The Hawaiian stories let it go without checkup, having neither a visit to the house nor a trip to the cemetery. Only Version C brings in cemeteries here as an important element, yet this version uses in addition all the other methods of discovering the hitchhiker's death mentioned in A and B.

The identity of the person who relates the tidings of demise varies con-

²⁹ See No. 5.

³⁰ See Nos. 4, 17.

³¹ See No. 32. This motif, characterizing a revenant from death by drowning is not common, but occurs in literature. Cf. A. Woolcott, *While Rome Burns*, pp. 83-86; B. Hecht and C. MacArthur, *The Scoundrel*.

³² See Nos. 3, 16.

³³ See Nos. 9, 35.

³⁴ See No. 13.

³⁵ See Nos. 13, 77.

siderably; however, members of the family are favored, most of all the mother. Disregarding an indecisive listing of "people" which occurs eight times, the family statistics stand: mother, 12; "family," 7; daughter, 2; husband, 2; father, 1; fiancé, 1. We have counted the fiancé as being, at least putatively, one of the family. Setting this total of twenty-five against a total of thirteen for such nonrelated persons as: "a woman," 7; inn-keeper or storekeeper, 2; landlady, 1; neighbor, 1; police, 1; and priests, 1, it seems likely that those variants with "a woman" entry really meant "mother," since the idea of a female relative coming to the door predominates through the story.

A striking characteristic of most of these stories is the "punch ending" when the final elements of the narration give the information that the hitchhiker is dead. The few variants in which the driver learns of the hitchhiker's being dead neither at the address she gave nor at the cemetery are either incomplete or aberrant in many details,³⁶ and in their lack of necessary elements cannot be considered typical stories.

The manner in which the revelation is made at her home has been discussed. This mode of learning the news is predominant. Of the five versions in which a trip to the cemetery is made, three of these only confirm the news heard at the house³⁷ or by accident elsewhere.³⁸ In one of the remaining two variants³⁹ the truth is not revealed until the young man finds his overcoat folded neatly and draped across a new grave; but in story 13 it is not his coat but her evening wrap and slippers lying on the grave that prove the grisly truth. In each instance, the cemetery motif is associated with Version C.

Of the twenty-eight versions in which the driver learns that the hitchhiker suffered a violent death, thirteen are automobile accidents and in ten of these the girl or woman was killed precisely at the spot where she was picked up. One minor deviation from this pattern occurs in Berkeley⁴⁰ in which the girl has been killed in an accident precisely in the way and at the spot where she saves her driver from death. This motif of violent death is most closely associated with Version A. It occurs twenty-eight times in the sixty stories classed as A, A variant, or A deficient. Although this is not quite a fifty per cent frequency, it shows a wide and random distribution over the whole territory. This fact gives it a claim to a place in the original story. Though inconclusive, the evidence indicates that the original hitchhiker suffered a violent death. That we should blame

³⁶ See Nos. 21, 30, 32, 33, 36.

³⁹ No. 14; see Nos. 3, 16 for this same element.

³⁷ See Nos. 15, 16, 76.

⁴⁰ See No. 8.

³⁸ See No. 13.

an automobile or find her at the spot of her death is not certain. Analogy with other ghost stories may have introduced the last element.⁴¹

In twenty-five versions the appearance of the hitchhiking ghost is a repetition of a previous visit; in eight of these the revenant shows up each year exactly on the anniversary of her death. Since these elements are of minor importance, their absence from the majority of stories does not prove their recency, but we have good evidence other than a random distribution that they are old; the dated stories, both early and recent, give conflicting testimony. Only in Hawaii is her repeated return never mentioned; it could be assumed that the Hawaiian versions stem from a source earlier than the birth of these elements. But Hawaii has a C-contaminated variant of Version A, and we are reasonably sure that Version C is comparatively recent. Therefore the element was probably lost before the story got to Hawaii.

The next element, the length of time since the death of the hitchhiker, varies from a few days to twenty-five years. But the length of time is not important in itself; its function in the story is to emphasize that the hitchhiker is thoroughly dead. The time is not important enough in itself to remain constant or to be included very often and the result is a wide but sporadic geographic distribution from the Atlantic seaboard to Hawaii.

The findings can be summarized briefly. In the original version curiosity or concern lead the driver to investigate the disappearance by going to the address the hitchhiker has given him. The girl's mother answers the door and tells him that his passenger was her dead daughter. Any well-told or reasonably complete version informs the driver specifically that his erstwhile passenger is dead, otherwise the point of the story is lost. In most variants he is told at the address she has given. Early stories, if not the original, add that the hitchhiker had been killed in an auto accident and that this was some time ago. It is less likely that in the early variants she was known to give repeat performances and it is impossible to tell how long the original hitchhiker was supposed to be dead.

Narrator's concluding remarks.—A few comments by the narrator frequently follow the story proper, almost always as indirect "evidence" of the truth of the story. If the experience so shocked a man known to the narrator or friend of his as to drive him insane, the incident could hardly have been imaginary! Or, the story is true because it was printed right in a newspaper or magazine, and being in black and white sets it above doubt

⁴¹ Stith Thompson, "Motif Index of Folk-Literature," *FF Communications* (1932), No. 107, E 275; R. Hankey, *op. cit.*, p. 160.

or cavil. Because specific details such as addresses are good "proof" of the incident, the narrator may apologize for not remembering them; the three addresses which were not forgotten are those of institutions which can be exact without street numbers.⁴² These proof features have no significant localization, but occur infrequently and at random. The insanity feature is of a different class; it is included because this is a ghost story, not because it is a factual tale.⁴³

When a variant is associated with a major event, it is most apt to belong to Version B in which predictions are made concerning the 1933 Century of Progress Exposition. Yet in an A and A variant, the story is told in connection with the Long Beach earthquake,⁴⁴ as well as the Century of Progress⁴⁵ but *without* the prediction. Since this element characterizes B, although two of the B versions lack it, and occurs only as an aberrance in the A version, the element patently belongs to Version B. In fact, the A versions in which a significant event is mentioned correspond in most particulars to Version B, lacking only the warning that is a hallmark of B. The suggestion offers itself that these may really be Version B stories, paradoxically told without the critical B element.

This discussion has shown that the major versions of the vanishing hitchhiker story follow a generally similar pattern throughout, but that each diverges characteristically not only in general trends and exclusive elements, but also in unimportant details. Version A contains the majority of general elements; B and C add certain specialized details which are not likely to have served as a source for Version A, but must rather have grown out of it. The most completely distinctive elements are found in Version C, which may have been an originally separate tale which was fitted into the hitchhiker pattern by convergence of details. Nevertheless, it should be emphasized that the C versions fit into each of the major episodic categories, thus resembling A and B in their structure more than do the other stories of nonghostly hitchhikers to which allusion will be made in a further section.

THE MAJOR VERSIONS

VERSION A

Forty-nine per cent of our stories fit perfectly into the Version A category. It greatly surpasses the other variants in distribution, being found in sixteen states and also in Mexico and Hawaii. It is a simple story, funda-

⁴² See Nos. 7, 9, 28.

⁴³ S. Thompson, *op. cit.*, E 265.

⁴⁴ See Nos. 7, 67.

⁴⁵ See No. 37.

mentally less complicated than B, C, or D and concerns an ordinary human being, a friend, or acquaintance, who picks up a strange girl on a street or highway. There is nothing weird or unnatural about this; the country is full of hitchhikers and people who give them rides. However, in the course of the ride this hitchhiker disappears mysteriously. Puzzled or anxious, the driver goes to her address and inquires about his passenger. In an instant the little adventure is suffused with horror. The girl, whom he had picked up, who rode in the same car and talked to him, has been dead for years!

The climax of the Version A stories hinges on this utterly unexpected revelation. The contrast between the ordinary circumstances, which are made all the more real by the specific addresses and the matter-of-fact atmosphere, and the ghastly realization that the passenger was a ghost, gives the story its peculiar power. This identical effect is gained in some of the finest literary ghost stories of the last few decades.⁴⁶

If we had only one or two variants of this nuclear story which claimed to antedate 1933, we might hesitate to accept the evidence which indicates that Version A is the "original" story. But nine stories scattered widely over the United States were heard by narrators well before 1933⁴⁷ and three were heard in 1933.⁴⁸ This fact, added to its enormous geographic spread, clinches Version A's position as the original story.

EXAMPLES OF VERSION A

5

Ossining, New York, 1940.—A man and his wife were driving home from a party late in the evening. The road was dark and deserted. Suddenly in the beam of the headlights they saw a girl standing at the side of the road—a suitcase in one hand and her coat in the other. Being fearful for the girl's safety on that dark, deserted road, they stopped the car and insisted that she ride with them. Without a word she got into the car and they rode on. Very few words were spoken. They rode in silence for about half an hour. The man, to break the silence, turned and asked where she lived so that he could take her home. But she had disappeared, leaving suitcase and coat. The man swears he was doing from thirty-five to forty miles an hour; so she couldn't have jumped out.

⁴⁶ Edith Wharton, "All Souls," "Afterward," *Ghosts* (New York, 1937); A. M. Scholl, "Gooseflesh in Literature," *Catholic World* (1940), v. 150, p. 310.

⁴⁷ See Nos. 9, 21–25; also "South Carolina Folk Tales," *Bulletin of the University of South Carolina* (October, 1941), pp. 77–84.

⁴⁸ See Nos. 37, 38, 63.

On the suitcase was an address. They went to this address and met an elderly woman of, say, sixty years of age. They explained what had happened; she told them that they were the tenth persons who had brought her a suitcase and a coat and showed them nine other suitcases and coats of the same design in a closet. She told them the girl was her daughter who had died a long time ago at the age of sixteen.

The man's wife, being a nervous type of person, took sick immediately afterward and was committed to an insane asylum. He nearly went wacky himself. I heard this story about two years ago and it's still going around. I asked my friend if he had heard it and he said he'd heard it in Pennsylvania, but differently worded.

6

Fort Worth, Texas, heard about 1939.—This story is quite popular in my home town. In fact I thought it was the only one until now. As I heard it, the young girl was walking along a lonely road which ran around a lake near Fort Worth. It was a rainy night and she was picked up by a couple and put in the back seat of their car. She said that she had gotten lost while on a picnic and it had started to rain so she had started home. She gave them an address to take her to, but upon reaching the city the couple found that she had disappeared. They went on to the address anyway and an old woman answered their knock. When they told her the story the woman began to cry and said that the young girl had been her daughter. She said that the girl had been drowned while on a picnic three years ago that night and that this was the third time in three years that someone had come on that night and told her the same story that they had.

7

Los Angeles, California, heard shortly after 1933.—This happened to some friends of mine. They were driving in the direction of Long Beach one Sunday afternoon. It was raining. They saw a girl in a white evening gown with a coat thrown over her shoulders, waiting at an intersection of Atlantic Boulevard and some definite street which I have forgotten. The couple picked the girl up. She sat in the back seat of the car and gave them an address in Long Beach to take her to. They tried to engage her in conversation but she was quite glum, so after a while they desisted. When they arrived at the street in Long Beach they were surprised, upon looking around, to see that she had disappeared. They rang the bell at the address and an elderly lady answered the door. After hearing their story

out she smiled wanly and said, "Yes, that was my daughter who was killed in an automobile accident at that intersection the night of the Long Beach earthquake. Many others before you have picked her up to bring her home, always with the same results."

8

Berkeley, California, 1935.—This story was heard in a Durant Avenue boarding house, told several times as a true story. It happened to a friend of the narrator. This friend was driving up Hearst Avenue one rainy night. As he came to North Gate (Hearst and Euclid avenues) he saw a girl, a student with books under her arm, waiting for the streetcar. Since these had stopped running, he offered her a ride. She lived up on Euclid. They drove out along Euclid quite a way with some conversation. As they were crossing an intersection, another car came down the steep hill and they would have crashed if the girl had not pulled on the emergency brake. The fellow was flabbergasted and sat looking at the other car, which pulled around him and went on. When he remembered his companion and looked over, she was gone. Since it was near her home, he assumed she had simply gotten out to walk the rest of the way; but she had left a book on the seat. The next day he went to return the book. He found her father, an English professor, at home. He said that the girl was his daughter, that she had been killed in an auto accident at the same corner one or two years ago that very day. But since the fellow had the book, the father took it into the library, to look on the shelves for it—he found the place where it should have been vacant. The book was in his hand.

9

Hawaii, 1926.—(This was told to the narrator by a friend from Hawaii.) The daughter of the governor of Hawaii was killed riding a bike, by the first auto in Hawaii. A number of times in the past fifteen years friends of Mr. —— have picked up a girl pushing a smashed bike along the road, looking for a ride. They put her in the back seat of the car. She gives the governor's mansion as her address. Conversation developed on the ride into town, but getting no answer the driver looks over to discover that she has disappeared. Upon returning the bike to the governor's mansion, they learn that she is dead. (Everyone knows that she has been *kahuna*'ed, i.e., bewitched.)

VERSION B

Compared with Version A, the distribution of the nine Version B stories is very limited; with one exception, a story from Sheldon, Iowa, they were heard within 175 miles of Chicago. Although the skeleton is very like the A story, some definite variations appear. The young girl of Version A is a woman or an old woman, the event takes place in the day time, and the auto is always occupied by several people. But the prophecy is an addition which completely shifts the climax of the story. The supernatural event which is the crux of the A story assumes minor importance and becomes only proof that the prophet was supernatural and therefore knew what she was talking about.

Because Version B is restricted in its currency, told only near Chicago (dated versions are three in 1933 and one in 1935), it is highly probable that this version arose in and around Chicago before 1933. Perhaps the prediction was involved arbitrarily and then applied to the Century of Progress Exposition. An old Chicago superstition that the lakeshore would some day slip into Lake Michigan may have had a significant influence.⁴⁹

In two variants the old woman carries a basket. Whether this shows any connection with a peculiar little old woman of German folklore, we do not know. This German supernatural carries a basket and climbs on farmers' wagons (frequently when the farmer is driving home alone at night), whereupon the horses are no longer able to pull the wagon.⁵⁰

EXAMPLES OF VARIANT B

10

Rockford, Illinois, 1933.—(The narrator's landlady told him that she had heard this story over the radio.) A man and his wife were driving home to Rockford from Chicago. They picked up an elderly woman hitchhiking home to Rockford. In the course of general conversation, she told them her street address. Then she told them that Northerly Island was going to disappear in Lake Michigan before some definite date (I believe she mentioned July 4). When the man's wife said something to her and she did not reply, they turned around to look at her and found her gone. When they reached Rockford they went to the address the woman had given and learned that she had died a year or two before.

⁴⁹ We owe most of these "prediction stories" to the kindness of Professor Hand of the University of California at Los Angeles, who is at present collecting parallels.

⁵⁰ K. Reiser, *Sagen, Gebräuche und Sprichwörter des Allgäus* (Kempten, 1895), Vol. 2, Nos. 104, 114, 119.

11

Joliet, Illinois, 1933.—People in an automobile going to the Century of Progress Exposition in Chicago are hailed by a woman with a traveling bag, standing by the roadside. They invite her to ride and she gets into the car, but her face is dark and they are unable to see it clearly. She gets into conversation and tells them that the fair in Chicago is going to slide off into Lake Michigan in September. She gives them her address in Chicago and invites them to call there. When they turn around to speak to her, they cannot find her; she has disappeared. They go to the address and meet a man; usually it is the woman's husband. After he has heard the story he says, "Yes, that was my wife. She died four years ago." Sometimes it is the woman's brother who tells that it is his sister.

12

Waukesha, Wisconsin (undated).—(This story was told to the narrator as an authentic account of an adventure of a near relative.—The persons concerned live in Port Washington, Wisconsin.) A man and his wife were traveling along a highway in the southern part of Wisconsin. They noticed an old woman walking along and stopped and asked if they might take her with them. She said she would be glad of a ride as she was on her way to Waukesha which was rather far away. She got into the back seat of their car, and told them the address to which she was going in Waukesha. They started discussing the World's Fair and the people mentioned that their relatives were planning to visit the fair on a certain week end in September. The old woman tried to convince them that they should by all means see to it that their family stay home on this particular week end because a dreadful catastrophe was going to happen at the fair.

Suddenly the couple became conscious of the fact that the passenger had been silent for some time. They turned to ask her a question and she was gone. They were at a loss to explain her disappearance. The only stop the car had made was a very slight pause for an arterial highway. They went on somewhat puzzled about the incident. Several weeks later, when they happened to be passing through Waukesha, they stopped at the address the woman had given them. The people living there reported that the person in question had not lived there for seven years.

VERSION C

Version C differs from Version A in many elements: the revenant is always a young girl; she is picked up in a place of amusement, not on the street or highway; she never disappears but is dropped off at a cemetery or her home; she leaves the driver's coat or her own garments on her grave. This new combination becomes a romantic tale of distinctly macabre quality. A young man meets an alluring and mysterious young girl at a dance, night club, or beer joint. After an enjoyable evening of drinking or dancing, he takes her home. But the ghostly female is not content with a quiet disappearance; she must return to her grave, a gruesome, vampire-like deed. Three versions carry out the evil female spirit motif to its logical conclusion, in two⁵¹ the young man has a nervous breakdown or goes insane. In one⁵² he dies two months after his encounter with the dead girl.

This story turns up in Chicago, Salt Lake City, southern California, and possibly Hawaii. We have eight typical versions and three in which some C elements have been added to the A story. Of these eleven versions ten are dated: nine were told between 1939 and 1940 and one (a C variant) in 1936. No A or B variant heard before 1935 contains a hint of any of the characteristic C elements. Before 1935 the hitchhiker was picked up on streets and roads and not in dance halls or night clubs. And it was not till 1939 that there was any record of a hitchhiker bringing harm to the humans who encountered her.⁵³

This group of stories presents some interesting problems. Did they develop from Version A or is C an independent story which gradually merged with the A version? With so few variants it is difficult to say. However, there is no doubt that Number 13 could stand alone, and it, or some tale like it, might be the original to which more and more elements of the older A story were added.⁵⁴

Version C also exhibits a curious and fascinating phenomenon—archaization. This is not so evident in the oral stories⁵⁵ as in some of the printed variants (in contrast to the general run of hitchhiker stories) which are

⁵¹ See Nos. 15, 76.

⁵² See No. 16.

⁵³ One exception: the man in story No. 26 (1931) had a nervous breakdown.

⁵⁴ After this article was completed we received several versions like No. 40 from the East and Middle West, in which the attractive young girl is picked up *at* a cemetery. This may be a distinct variant of the Version A story, but we are not yet certain; our earliest variant is dated 1935.

⁵⁵ See Nos. 13, 14, 15.

crammed almost to the bursting point with Old World folk ideas. Number 16 is an extreme example: the young girl looked as if she were floating on air, i.e., ghostly; she felt cold; her image was not seen in a mirror; she had loved the boy in life and her spirit returned for him; the boy died two months later; the spirit of the girl returned to her grave and (it is intimated) reentered it.

These elements are common in European folklore and may be found in many literary ghost stories. By far the greater number of European ghosts show definite supernatural characteristics⁵⁶ and many of them feel cold to the touch.⁵⁷ The fact that vampires cannot see themselves in mirrors has been well publicized by Mr. Stoker.⁵⁸ The dead lover who returns for his (or her) beloved is a well-known figure of European lore, and it is also widely believed in Europe that seeing a spirit will cause illness or drive a person insane.⁵⁹ Finally, in all of the variants the girl returns to her grave, a typical action of a vampire.

This raises an interesting question: did Version C start as a comparatively simple story like Number 13 or 14 or was a literary variant like Number 16 streamlined by much oral repetition? The careful analysis of many more variants might give the solution to this pertinent problem.

EXAMPLES OF VARIANT C

13

Salt Lake City, Utah (undated).—A Salt Lake City nurse was engaged to a doctor. She died just before the scheduled marriage. A man, a common friend of her and the doctor, saw her at a dance, wearing a striking evening dress. Not knowing of her death, he took her home. She got out of the car before they arrived at her door, not wanting to be taken directly there. The next day he found out at the hospital (he was also a doctor) that she had died. He went to the grave, feeling upset, and found the evening clothes she had worn lying on top of the new grave.

14

Los Angeles, California, 1940.—This actually happened to a fellow I know. He and his friend were in a beer joint in downtown Los Angeles.

⁵⁶ S. Thompson, *op. cit.*, E 272; Bächtold-Stäubli, *Handwörterbuch des deutschen Aberglaubens* (1930), Gestalt der Geister, III, pp. 488, 495.

⁵⁷ S. Thompson, *op. cit.*, E 215.

⁵⁸ Bram Stoker, *Dracula* (New York, 1897), pp. 19–20. It is not at all unlikely that the play and motion picture based on *Dracula* and the sequel *Dracula's Daughter* influenced some of the C versions.

⁵⁹ S. Thompson, *op. cit.*, E 215 and E 265.

They met a young woman there. She asked them if they'd take her home because she lived in the same neighborhood (Belvedere Gardens). So they all got in the car and she sat in the back seat. It was a very cold night and she borrowed one of their overcoats. When they reached the Evergreen Cemetery, she asked them if they'd stop a minute. So they stopped and let her out. They waited. When she didn't come back they thought she had stolen the overcoat. They got a little aggravated and went out to look for her. They went into the cemetery and looked around. Then they saw the overcoat draped over a headstone.

15

North Riverside, Illinois, 1939.—(This story was told to the narrator by a man who said he knew the boys concerned very well.) These boys went to a public dance. It was in a small town and they knew most of the people there. They saw a very attractive girl in a white dress, and one of the boys asked her to dance with him. Her hands were so cold that he thought she was ill. However, after the dance was over they offered to take the girl home and she consented. They got into the car and she gave them her address. But when they got to the Oak Ridge Cemetery the girl said, "I forgot. I promised I'd get out here."

The boys saw her go through a hedge. They waited, but she didn't come back. They went into the cemetery and looked around but found nothing. They saw a man and a woman leaving, but couldn't find the girl. Worried, they went to the address she had given them. The people there said, "Are you sure she gave you this address?" They showed the boys some pictures and the boys recognized the girl at the dance. "That's even the dress she was wearing," they said. Then the people told them that the girl was their daughter and that she had died two years ago. This happening preyed so on one of the boy's minds that he went to the Elgin hospital for the insane and died about six months later.

16

South Pasadena, California.—(Abridged from the version printed in the Pasadena *Independent*, Wednesday, November 6, 1940.) A musician and two friends went to a dance. They saw a pretty girl all in white who looked as if she were floating on air. Bill, one of the friends, made the girl's acquaintance and danced with her. He took her home and since the girl "felt cold" he had her wear his coat; she forgot to return it. He returned to her home for the coat, hoping also to renew her acquaintance. The

girl's mother told him her daughter had died three years ago. She offered to show him the grave. They went to the cemetery and found his coat on the grave. The young man and the mother returned to the home, where he met the sister of the spectral dancer. She told him, "Linda (the dead girl) and I always waved to you on our way to school and went to every dance we could. Linda loved you, but of course you didn't know."

Bill died two months later. The other friend went insane and the narrator "came close to it." (He closes his story with the observation that he remembered that he had not seen the girl's image in a mirror at the dance. "You can't see a ghost in a mirror.")

VERSION D

From Hawaii we have six stories, two A versions and two interesting variants of A. Yet two others differ enough to be termed Version D. According to Hawaiian mythology the goddess Pelee appears and seeks aid from humans, punishing those who refuse. It is curious that in both stories the goddess carried a basket. Whether this fact connects the stories with the two middle western variants in which the old woman carries a basket we do not know.⁶⁰

We do not have dates for these stories. However, they do not look like the originals of a vivid Hawaiian tale which spread all over the United States, for no variant found in America gives the slightest hint of an Hawaiian origin. Besides, Version A is so well established in the United States that it is far more likely that the Pelee stories are variants, conforming to Hawaiian traditions.

EXAMPLE OF VERSION D⁶¹

17

Oahu (undated).—This was told by an Hawaiian girl. She was driving with friends to a dance in the country on Oahu. They passed an old woman burdened with a basket but did not stop to offer her a lift. As they drew away from her a boy looked back and saw that the old woman had disappeared. They speeded up, frightened, until they reached their destination, the club. There they were told, as some had feared, that the old woman was Pelee. They returned but could not find her.

VARIANTS

These variants are reproduced substantially as they were told to us. We have made no additions or subtractions. When we refer to the "narrator"

⁶⁰ See Nos. 36, 74.

⁶¹ See also No. 4.

it means the person who told us the story. For additional versions already in print see "South Carolina Folk Tales," *Bulletin* of the University of South Carolina (October, 1941), pp. 72-74; R. Hankey, "California Ghosts," *California Folklore Quarterly*, I (April, 1942), pp. 173-177.

18

Chicago, Illinois, 1941.—This mysterious story went the rounds here last winter, and I first heard it from "a friend who heard it from a friend in Chicago who had heard it from her neighbor."

Mike, the cab driver, tells this story of a mysterious fare he had in early December. Cruising on a street in downtown Chicago he picked up an elderly Sister of some Catholic order and was told to take her to _____ Street. He had his radio on and they talked about Pearl Harbor for a while. She said, "It won't last more than four months." Then they drove on and Mike drew up at the address. Jumping out to open the cab door he was surprised to find no one there. Afraid the little old lady had "jumped" her fare he hastened to inquire at the address. It was a convent and when questioned by the Superior in charge Mike told of the Sister who had disappeared and hadn't paid her fare. "What did she look like?" the Superior asked, and explained that no Sister from the convent had been downtown that day. As Mike described her, he happened to look at a picture hanging on the wall behind the Superior's desk. "That's her," Mike said, and thought to himself that he would get the fare after all. But the Mother Superior smiled quietly and said, "But she has been dead for ten years."

The only thing wrong with the story is that it's over four months since they dreamed it up and the war isn't over yet.

19

San Francisco, California, 1942.—The police investigated the story as told by a taxicab driver who came to the police station to see if he were crazy. He had picked up a fare on Mission Street, a lone nun, and taken her to the house of her order. He thought nothing of her being alone as he did not realize that nuns travel severally in public. En route she asked him about the war, and he said it looked bad. She replied, "Well, it will end in September." When they reached the convent, she had no money for her fare, so she went inside to get some. The driver waited half an hour in vain for her return and then rang the bell. The Sister in charge of the door told him that no one had been away and that the door had

not been opened all evening. As the door swung farther open, the driver saw the lighted interior. Suddenly he pointed, saying, "There she is!" He was pointing at a life-size statue of the Blessed Virgin which stood in the entrance hall. After the Sister explained the identity of the image, he went to the police station to check on his sanity.

20

Berkeley, California (undated).—As a car slowed down at the corner of Bancroft Way and College Avenue, a girl signaled for a ride. She was picked up by two students, a fellow and his girl. It was a rainy evening. They asked her where she was going and she gave them her address. When they arrived, they turned around and found she was not in the car. They rang the doorbell and found that she was a professor's daughter, killed in an accident at the corner of Bancroft and College, several years before. Each year on the anniversary of her death, she appears and gets a ride.

21

Thebes, Illinois, 1920.⁸²—(The narrator said he faintly remembered hearing this story when he was small.) The vehicle was not an auto or bus but a small box-like affair used by the mail carriers on rural routes and drawn by one horse. The mail carrier out on his route once picked up a woman he knew, possibly a relative, and took her down the road. Finally they came to a stream. After a while, he looked around (the woman sat at his side) and she wasn't there. The mail carrier learned later that the woman he had picked up had died at the time.

22

Georgia, 1912 (somewhat abridged).—A young man was riding in his buggy through a strange part of the state on business, trying to reach a certain inn by midnight. Just as he was passing a grove of giant oaks, he saw a girl in a light dress that seemed of a bygone period, standing beside the roadway. He at once stopped and asked if he could assist her. In a low, sweet voice she told him she had been left alone in the grove and desired to be taken home. As he assisted her into the carriage he was amazed at the lightness of her body; in fact there was a strange dreamlike quality about the whole affair. He also observed a dark stain upon her frock.

They drove a few miles up the lonely road, and her home proved to be

⁸² We received this variant and No. 29 from Grace Partridge Smith, who has also published another variant in "Folklore from 'Egypt,'" *The Journal of American Folklore*, LIV (1941), 54-55.

the ruins of an old Southern mansion, its white columns cold and ghostly in the moonlight. The floor of the verandah had fallen in, but the girl floated up the old stone steps and across the place where the floor had been, the stain on her gown showing too plainly that it was moonlit *blood!* As the young man watched in horror she disappeared through the ruined doorway, whereupon he drove his horse, which had been rearing with fright ever since the girl appeared, at a rapid pace up the roadway to the inn. The innkeeper told him that he had been with the neighborhood ghost, a girl who had been murdered by her jealous lover many years before, just at midnight, in that very grove. On moonlight nights her spirit lingered there, and any traveler passing just at midnight would be accosted, and requested to take her to the old family mansion where she lived, which had now long lain in ruins.

23

Montana, 1920.—(This was supposed to be a true story. The narrator heard it from a man who had just been released from the navy.) It concerned picking up a young girl who had previously been killed at the spot she was picked up.

24

Summit, Illinois (told before 1933).—The narrator said that she could remember having heard a story before the World's Fair of a woman near the graveyard at Summit. She had stopped people and asked for a ride, had given them a Chicago address and disappeared. When the people called at the address, they learned that the woman had died some time before.

25

Hot Springs, Virginia, 1930.—("This is supposed to be true, and all that stuff.") A couple were driving to Covington, Virginia. They picked up a girl who left some article in the car, after they had dropped her. They took it to her folks, who told them she was dead.

26

*Cleveland, Ohio, 1931.*⁶³—(This story was vouched for by a friend of a friend of the narrator.) A young man, motoring home late one night over a deserted highway, slowed down for a dangerous intersection and saw, standing by the roadside, a girl, bareheaded and dressed in evening ap-

⁶³ Reprinted from the *New Yorker*, "Shouts and Murmurs" col., A. Woollcott (November 13, 1931).

parel. She signaled him to stop and, giving some explanation about a misunderstanding which had left her stranded, asked him to take her back to the city. He was half fearful of a hold-up trick, but she was quite alone, and he decided to take the risk. The girl seemed very tired and, after giving him the number of her home in a familiar street, lapsed into silence. They drove on to town without further conversation.

Swinging into the street the girl had mentioned, the driver turned to speak to her and discovered with a shock that she was no longer in the car. He had been driving steadily for many miles and knew she could not possibly have gotten out. It was hard for him to credit his own senses. He pulled up before the number she had given, and after a dazed moment, walked up to the house and rang the bell.

A weary-looking elderly gentleman invited him in, listened without surprise to his incoherent account, and offered him a shot of whisky to steady his nerves. Yes, this had happened before, he said. Hardly a month passed without a visit late at night from some distracted young man who told a similar story. Yes, he knew the girl whom they all described. She was undoubtedly his daughter, who had been killed in a collision at that intersection more than a year before.

27

San Fernando, California, 1935.—This girl was picked up on Whittier Boulevard and taken to San Fernando Mission by an old man and his wife, who bundled her up in the back seat in blankets and robes because she was inadequately dressed for such a cold, windy, rainy night. Traffic conditions made conversation so difficult that they thought the girl, having got warm, had gone to sleep. Priests at the mission said the girl was a foundling who had lived at the mission all her life. But she had been killed in traffic on Whittier Boulevard two years before and that was the third car that had stopped there that evening with the same story. They were much upset, but the old couple continued on their way to San Francisco.

28

San Francisco, California (undated).—("This is a true story.") There was a fellow driving alone, who passed St. Ignatius' Church in San Francisco, on a stormy, wet day. He saw a woman, dressed in black and veiled, by the church; he offered her a ride, since she obviously was waiting for something of the sort. She gave him an address. On the way there they talked; as they came near her place, he noticed that she was not answering

him and looked over toward her. She was gone. He went to the address, found a man there who proved to be her father. He was told she had died about a year before.

29

Du Quoin, Illinois (undated).—(This story was told to the narrator by a cousin who knew one of the two drivers of the bus in question.) It seems that two boys were bringing a bus from one town to another. They had to pass through several towns. It was raining hard—almost sheets of water; it was also cold. The boys had been driving since early morning. It was now evening and they were very tired. They kept talking to keep awake. The bus was empty. Suddenly, one of them saw about a hundred feet in front the figure of a girl. She had on a white gown and was standing very still by the side of the road. They stopped the bus and asked her if she would ride. She nodded, whereupon she got in and sat down on the floor in the aisle. They asked her to have a seat but she refused and also refused a raincoat which one of the boys offered her. As the bus drove along she became talkative. She told them where she was going, which was the next town, and even gave them the street address. The boys continued talking to her, but they did not look at her since the rain had now become heavier and it took both of them to watch the road. Presently, they drove over a bridge and as they drove over they asked her a question. She did not answer, and, as one of the boys turned, he saw the girl was gone! This rather unnerved them, for the bus had not stopped and they had not opened the door. They continued their trip, arriving in town in about thirty minutes. They parked the bus at the station and went quickly to the address the girl had given. It was late evening, but when they rapped a woman came to the door and asked what they wanted. They told her the episode and she thanked them for coming. She told them that at the spot where they had picked up the girl, her daughter had been killed in an auto accident four years before. They were the third party to come and tell her of the same episode which had happened each year.

30

Urbana, Illinois (undated).—About five or six miles west of Urbana on the hard road there is a graveyard. One time an auto was going along on the hard road, Route 150, between Urbana and Danville. Before they came to the cemetery a woman was hitchhiking along the road and the man stopped the car to pick her up. She got in the back seat of the car. The man drove by the graveyard. A little while after, he noticed the woman had disappeared.

31

A Midwest City (undated).—(This happened to a friend of the narrator's brother-in-law.) While driving in a midwest city he picked up a young woman who gave him her address. When they arrived, she had disappeared. Having her name and address, he went to the door. A woman answered and said it was her daughter, dead twenty-five years before.

32

Honolulu, Hawaii, 1936.—(This happened to a reporter on the Honolulu *Star*, new to the Islands.) Out late on an assignment, he drove to Waikiki beach for a swim. There he found a girl alone on the beach; she looked at him questioningly. He talked to her and drove her home. She told him to stop as he came to a house hidden among trees, off the road which leads up Nuuanu Valley. She thanked him and as she got out shook hands and told him her name (now forgotten by narrator). He realized that her hand was wet, and felt the seat where she had been. He found it also wet, with a piece of seaweed lying on it. The next day in conversation with a friend, he learned that she had been the daughter of a wealthy family and had been drowned on Waikiki Beach.

33

Washington, D. C. (undated).—A Washington man's wife was very ill in the hospital and died. She promised him she would return. So each year there is a tale that a woman gets into a taxi and tells the driver to go to a certain house, and to be sure to go up and ring the doorbell no matter what happens. When the driver arrives at the address there is no one in the car. He rings the doorbell of the house. The husband comes to the door, says nothing, but pays the taxi driver.

34

Puebla, Mexico (undated).—(This happened to a friend of the narrator.) A traveling salesman who frequently traveled the road between Puebla and Mexico City was en route to Puebla one day with a friend when he saw a girl walking along the highway. He stopped, offered her a ride, found she was going to a town on his route. They arrived there in the evening, when the girl invited the two men to stay for supper. They found she had a sister at her house (the absence of a dueña was explained at length by the narrator) and with beer and dancing passed the evening

very pleasantly. The salesmen left on their route, intending to return for another pleasant visit when opportunity offered. They had no chance for some time—about a month—and when they did get back, they found the house deserted, overgrown, the doors sealed with stickers. They inquired to find how this could be, asking the storekeeper who sold them the beer and remembered their arriving before. But he said the girls had not lived there then, that one had been killed on the highway between Mexico City and Puebla (where she had been picked up) and that the other had left for an unknown destination about two years before.

35

Honolulu, Hawaii, 1936.—(This was told aboard ship leaving Honolulu in 1936, as happening to a friend of one of the crew.) The friend was a reporter on the *Honolulu Star*, new to the Islands in 1934. As you go out Fort Street you come to Nuuanu Boulevard, which runs out toward the falls that drop over the Pali. This reporter, who lived in Nuuanu Valley, where the homes of the wealthy are spread in the hills above Honolulu, had been out on an assignment and was driving home late in the night. He came to a stop at an arterial, where Fort Street comes into Nuuanu, when he heard a feminine voice. He looked around and saw a girl, who asked if he would drive her up the road. He asked her to get in the car, noticing that she was an attractive girl in evening clothes, with a cowled black velvet cape over her head and shoulders. She said her father's house was up the Nuuanu, almost to Pali Road. He proposed that they drive out for a drink and a dance before going home, being ready for what might come along. When she accepted, he drove back through town and out to a road house, where they had several dances. But she would not drink even when he ordered for her, nor would she take a cigarette. And he noticed that she did not take the cowl of her cape from her head. The place closed soon and they had to leave. They parked and “necked” for a bit on the Pali road. He noticed again that she smelled strongly of perfumes and cosmetics, and that she continued to wear the cowl. Finally she said, “I'd better go home now.” So he drove her back to Nuuanu. At a place where there was no house in sight for a couple of hundred yards, she said, “You can stop here.” When he questioned this, she said, “I can make it all right.” The last he heard was a silvery laugh as she went into the darkness. He had learned her name, Marian Crawford. So the next day he looked for “Crawford” in the phone book, but didn't find it there. Later a friend mentioned the Crawfords,

saying that they had left for the mainland after the death of their daughter. The reporter described the incident. His friend grew pale and said, "Marian Crawford was killed in an auto accident on Nuuanu Boulevard." The girl had been given to high living, drinking, and cutting up—she had been killed on the way home from a wild party.

36

Farmington, Minnesota, 1936.—(This story was widely told in Minnesota about five years ago.) Near Farmington, a man, driving on the highway, picked up an old woman carrying a basket of apples. As they drove along, she suddenly disappeared. Later, he learned that she had previously died, or that she was connected with someone's death.

37

Chicago, Illinois, 1933.—(This story was in circulation at the time of the Century of Progress Exposition.) It concerned men who gave an automobile ride to a woman who was walking along a highway. They put her into the rear seat of a two-door sedan. She vanished while the doors were closed, but following up the conversation which they had had with her, they finally located her former home and described her so accurately that her parents easily identified her as their deceased daughter.

38

Long Beach, California, 1933.—(This was told to the narrator by a woman who said it actually had happened.) A number of persons were killed in the Long Beach earthquake; others were evacuated. While some people were driving back to Long Beach, they picked up an old woman who gave them her address in Long Beach (original exact). She sat in the back seat. They were stopped by traffic several times. When they arrived at the address, she was gone, leaving something in the car. They were not surprised, because the old woman had seemed dazed, but when they asked at the house next door they found she had been killed a few days before in the earthquake.

39

Midwest (about 1935).—Some large city was mentioned. A man picked up a middle-aged woman. She said she had to get into the city. She recommended a hotel and warned him to be careful, because there was going to be an epidemic. He took her to the address, but she left something in the car. He found the house deserted when he returned the next morn-

ing. He asked the neighbors, who said her husband had been ill at home while she was away. In returning to town she had been killed. Since then people frequently had come to their house with articles supposedly hers.

40

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 1937 or 1938.—It seems that a friend of a friend whom none of us ever actually met had gone to a dance and after taking his girl home, he started for his home which was out in a suburb called Frankford. It was raining and misty and as he was passing a cemetery (I have forgotten the name of it) he saw a girl in a white satin evening dress standing by the road. He asked if he could help her as it was quite late and she said she wanted to go to her home and gave him the address. She insisted upon getting into the back of the car alone. The boy claims to have taken her to the address she mentioned, but upon arriving there, discovered that she had vanished. His car was a two-door sedan and he couldn't figure out how she had gotten out without his seeing her. He went up and knocked on the door of her house; her mother answered the door and said that he must have picked up her daughter. The daughter had been killed in an automobile accident just at the spot where he had picked her up and she had been wearing the clothes he had described. Her mother told the boy to forget about it as it happened every few months and that it wasn't anything unusual to her.